Simply Better!

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The Voice of the Customer

A Guide to Measuring Satisfaction with Employment and Training Programs

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INTRODUCTION

A. About Simply Better!

Simply Better! - An Initiative for Continuous Improvement is a technical-assistance initiative designed to help local employment and training- program practitioners incorporate the lessons and principles of the quality revolution into their daily operations. Organizations currently affiliated with **Simply Better!** include private industry councils, employment and training service providers, state and local governments and the U.S. Department of Labor. **Simply Better!** helps employment and training professionals and organizations that are committed to improving their services and outcomes.

While serious discussions are now taking place about the future of job-training programs nationwide, the foundation for developing America's workforce is at the local level, regardless of the funding sources.

Multiple factors affect almost every aspect of employment and training program operations. Among the most significant are:

• the need to demonstrate to the Congress and the public that our programs work and will continue to improve;

• the National Performance Review and the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993, which are taking the federal government on new paths to find better ways to measure the value of government programs;

• major emphasis by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA) on using customer-satisfaction measures to determine program success; and

• the ETA's determination to strengthen the capacity of the employment and training system to provide high-quality, high-value services.

In a nutshell, this book explains:

1. How to identify your customers.
2. How to recognize the factors of your operation that influence your customers' satisfaction.
3. How to improve those factors.

B. Using This Guide

This introduction to designing and implementing continuous-improvement programs is being disseminated as part of the **Simply Better!** initiative, which has two broad objectives:

• To create a network of employment and training professionals and organizations committed to customer-satisfaction, exceptional quality and continuous improvement of their services and outcomes.

• To create products and broker services that help those organizations.

Part I, DEFINING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS, defines both customers and customer-satisfaction in terms of the employment and training world and discusses why satisfying your customers is important to you.

Part II, HEARING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS, suggests ways to reach your customers and gather their opinions. It discusses surveys, focus groups, and other research techniques and explains how to design and carry out customer research.

Part III, INTERPRETING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS, discusses data analysis for non-statisticians. It tells how to translate your customers' opinions into improvements in your operations

The APPENDIX, lists sources of more information about customer-satisfaction, focus groups, surveying and data analysis. It includes samples of survey instruments used by the employment and training community.

SECTION I

DEFINING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

DEFINING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

A. Who Are Your Customers?

The term customer means different things to different people. In the business world, a customer usually is someone who buys a service or product from another person or group of people. An organization can have both *internal* customers (other units of the same organization for which the department provides products or services) and *external* customers (ultimate end-users of the company's product).

• With government services, however, users often do not pay directly: taxpayers pay. The continued existence of government agencies and services depends not on the willingness of direct users to pay, but on the political support of those who appropriate the funds.

Who, then, are the customers of the local public employment and training system: clients, employers, the mayor, the Department of Labor, governors, the congress, the community, the taxpayers, or all the above?

It makes sense for employment and training programs to define or identify their customers more precisely than they have done in the past. Why?

• It is easier to serve and satisfy people you can identify than people you cannot. Customer-satisfaction is the relationship between what the customer expects and what s/he perceives s/he receives. The range of expectations and perceptions is more manageable if customer groups are narrowly defined.

• If everyone is your customer, you have to satisfy everyone. That's a tough job!

Customers of employment and training programs are the direct beneficiaries of the services: the jobseekers and the employers who hire them. Satisfying these two groups should be your most important goal. You should direct your quality management primarily toward satisfying your customers.

B. Defining Customer-Satisfaction

What is customer-satisfaction? It is the degree to which your agency meets or exceeds the expectations of the individual jobseekers and employers with whom you interact. Such expectations might include:

- Availability of service: the degree to which your customers can readily and easily contact you.
- Responsiveness of service: reacting promptly to the customer.
- Timeliness of service: providing services within the customer's stated and/or negotiated time frame.
- Comprehensiveness of service: the degree to which the service is complete.
- Pleasantness of service: the degree to which you use suitable professional behavior and manners while working with customers.
- Reliability of service: whether your organization does what it promises customers it will do.
- Overall satisfaction with service: the degree to which the customers are satisfied with what they received.

It is important to note that ***customer-satisfaction*** is not the same as ***customer-service*** in its traditional sense, or even the same as quality operations:

- **Customer-service** is measured by standards set by *you*, your board or your experts.
- **Customer-satisfaction** is measured by your *customers'* standards, whether or not these standards make sense to you. Your customers may be dissatisfied even though, by objective standards, your agency is doing a great job, or at least the best under the circumstances. Your customers may be satisfied only by details you think are naive, expensive or trivial. It is important to find out what *your* customers think.

An improved sensitivity to customer-satisfaction can benefit your agency.

• Program Planning.

Input about services that customers want helps you set short-and long-range program goals, which can help you in:

- Identifying appropriate target groups.
- Choosing appropriate services for those groups.
- Determining optimal program outcomes and results.

• Program Operations Capacity Development.

Customer input about how your services are delivered and how customers are treated can help you develop your service-delivery capacity by:

- Developing the capacity to provide high-quality services.
- Improving the skills and abilities of staff members who deal with customers.
- Choosing high-quality service providers
- Improving staff morale.
- Developing effective linkages between programs and agencies.

• Oversight and Evaluation.

Customer input about satisfaction with current services and/or outcomes can help you monitor your program's effectiveness by:

- Determining whether your program meets its stated goals.
- Deciding whether your program meets its customers' expectations.
- Identifying problems before they develop into serious crises.
- Identifying needed improvements and developing action-plans.

• Marketing and Public Relations.

Satisfied customers praise your program; you can't find better advertising.

- Satisfied first-time customers return for repeat business.
- Satisfied employers with a choice favor your agency.
- Satisfied trainees are better motivated, more likely to complete their training and better prepared job seekers.
- As satisfied customers spread the word, taxpayers develop positive views about the need for and value of workforce development services in general and your agency in particular.

• Preparation for Change.

Public programs that can demonstrate that they serve the needs and desires of their customers have an advantage for future funding.

• Implementing Quality-Management Techniques.

The drive for continuous improvement in the business community rests on a solid foundation of information about customers: who they are, what they want, how they want to be treated and whether the organization is meeting their expectations. Public agencies that wish to develop their own quality management procedures will also be able to consistently answer these questions in meaningful ways.

However. Customer-satisfaction, though important, is certainly not the only measurement you should make to judge your organization's success. You have to balance it against other concerns, such as cost, desire for specific outcomes, budgetary or legal constraints and other external procedural requirements and regulations. These other concerns often outweigh the satisfaction of customers in the decisions of local employment and training program operators. **Simply Better!** attempts to rank customer-satisfaction Concern Number One.

C. Four Points to Influence Customer-Satisfaction

You can influence customer-satisfaction at four points:

1. Influence customers' **expectations**. Promise only services that you can deliver. Make sure that your advertising, promotions and orientations are realistic, factual and understandable to their intended audience. Make your potential customers optimistic enough to use your services without creating expectations you cannot meet.

2. Influence the **perceptions** of your services. Make sure customers know every thing you're doing to assist them. Do customers know how well your services compare with other typical services.

3. Influence what customers **actually receive**.

4. Concentrate management's efforts on improving those things that customers **care about**. Making sure your financial reports are prepared perfectly and submitted on time does not necessarily improve customers' satisfaction.

Customers' Expectations and Improvement

The hospitality industry has long been a leader in measuring customer- satisfaction, partly because travel books and magazines often rate hotels based on the opinions of both *incognito* inspectors and ordinary guests. Employment and training agencies can learn two lessons from the experiences of hotels.

Lesson One: Perception matters.
Many hotels smother their guests with services beyond clean sheets and shower curtains that close: Consider airport transportation, fax connections and bathrobes — at premium prices, of course. Hotel operators believe these extras increase their customers' satisfaction. But do they? If guests lose sleep because the mattress sags and can't read because the light bulbs are dim, how significant were the shampoo and chocolate on the pillow?

What really determines satisfaction is the customers' perceived value of the services rendered. If the room is drafty, perception may not be enhanced by five-star ratings. And no-frills hotels are flourishing. Customer-satisfaction, therefore, is intimately tied to what that customer *perceives as valuable.*

Lesson Two: Expectations expand to meet the service. It's possible to view customer-service as consisting of various ascending levels. At the bottom is the organization's most basic product. In a hotel, it's the room. The next level may consist of such support services as convenient check-in, baggage handling, etc. Another, higher level may include the five-star amenities. Over time, customers come to expect higher level, enhanced services as part of their usual experience -- and for a modest price.

As satisfaction with unchanged basic services declines, management must think of new and exciting ways to attract guests in order to survive the competition. *Thus, attention to customer-satisfaction forms the basis of, and creates the necessity for, continuous improvement strategies.*

SECTION II

HEARING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

HEARING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMERS

A. General Considerations about Customer Research

Research Rule Number One:
Any structured research is better than guessing what your customers think, but no single research method gives the absolute, unassailable truth. Even highly sophisticated, statistically valid polls and surveys sometimes produce false results. (Remember the headlines *Dewey Defeats Truman!* on the morning after Truman's presidential election.) If you use surveys, you should test the results against data and impressions gained through other, less formal means.

Research Rule Number Two:
The more complicated your information-gathering process, the greater the chance of error. Surveys, which are very complicated, should be planned and designed carefully.

Research Rule Number Three:
Choose an information-gathering technique that best fits the problem you are trying to solve.

B. Qualitative vs. Quantitative Research

The two principal ways to gather information from customers are *qualitative research* and *quantitative research.* Each serves a specific purpose; sometimes the two methods are used together.

1. Qualitative research
Qualitative research, also known as exploratory research, is a semi-structure information-gathering method whose purpose is to address and forward hypotheses to help explain the "why's" of marketing problems. Internally you may brainstorm among yourselves to speculate on customers' attitudes or behaviors, but only customers ultimately hold the information you need to formulate meaningful hypotheses.

The need for a clear and precise statement of the recognized problem and/or an understanding of the issue is the main goal of qualitative research. It is important to have a clear objective before you spend the time and effort conducting a research project to measure your customers' opinions. Ask: What will we do with the research results when we get them? Will the data be useful in improving our operations, or just a collection of interesting information? Too many research reports sit on shelves unread because they didn't address relevant issues or answer the right questions.

Once you decide what you need to know about your program, you can begin asking some questions regarding your customers: What do you already know about them? What additional information would help you do a better job? And finally, what are the best ways to gather these additional data?

Qualitative research produces information that is not generalizable to your customers as a whole, but that gives you insights into the views of the particular customers you examine and thereby suggests hypotheses about your customers in general. Focus groups, advisory boards, seminar evaluation forms, informal conversations with staff and management-by-walking-around are examples of such informational sources. They are useful for gathering a wide variety of ideas and impressions about your operations but are not rigorously mathematical. They don't prove anything, but they are valuable nonetheless, if only to tell you where to look further.

2. Quantitative research

Quantitative research is so called because it attempts to quantify attitudes and behavior from the population of interest. Telephone surveys, mail surveys and personal interviews are examples of quantitative research that attempt to quantify the issues, using a structured list of questions to ensure consistency across respondents.

When you fully understand the issues and are satisfied that your definitions of the service problem/s and research objective/s are clear, use quantitative research to quantify the "facts" with *what, where,* and *when* rather than *why.*

Quantitative research methods usually draw upon a sample of the larger population of interest to adequately represent the population as a whole. Often hundreds or thousands of customers can be interviewed.

C. Informal Research Techniques

There are a number of informal ways to obtain information about your customers' satisfaction with your programs:

• Use **administrative information** that's on file. Before hiring a survey firm, look through your own data. Can you tell, for instance, why participants drop out? Do drop-outs occur often among certain groups, or from certain services? Do employers give you repeat business? Do employers prefer to hire students from certain services and subcontractors but not others? What are the characteristics of clients who choose certain services or training courses?

• Listen to **complaints, compliments and suggestions** from participants. Establish easy channels for customers to express opinions to the appropriate person in non-embarrassing ways. Record complaints and analyze patterns over time. Have a mechanism to investigate and resolve complaints quickly and in a manner visible to customers. Implement a system to do this routinely.

• Walk around your facility and engage your customers in informal **intercept interviews.** Encourage appropriate staff members to do the same to observe their own operations. Talk to customers who are waiting for service. Chat with individuals or small groups before and after classes. Approach customers when they appear particularly happy or sad or pensive.

• Analyze **retention rates**. Which graduates from which programs have longevity with which employers? Is there a pattern over time?

• Analyze **repeat business** from employers. Have job developers query firms about hiring standards and skill requirements during their regular contacts. Ask a few questions about whether your referrals meet their needs.

• Research **industry hiring patterns** to identify employers' needs without surveying each firm. Ask chambers of commerce or industry associations for help.

• Use **mystery shoppers**. Have a friend or board member make an appointment for service, come in and make a report on her/his experience.

D. Focus Groups

Focus groups are one of the most effective and widely used sources of gathering qualitative data about customer-satisfaction.

In a focus group, bring together a small number of individuals, typically eight to 12, with a moderator or interviewer who leads them through a loosely-structured, free-flowing dialogue regarding an existing or proposed service. Recruit participants, perhaps with monetary incentives, to meet at a designated time and place. Screen potential participants to meet the desired criteria of the target customer.

The focus-group activity is not a rigidly constructed question-and-answer session, but a flexible discussion focusing on predetermined issues. Sometimes, individuals from the organization sponsoring the research are able to directly observe the groups from an adjacent second room with a one-way mirror, even sending and receiving notes from the moderator to probe specific issues while the group is ongoing. You can also videotape the group for later viewing

The moderator, a trained interviewer skilled in leading the discussion of these groups, often is hired from outside of the organization sponsoring the research in order to maximize objectivity.

Pro's and Con's of Focus Groups

The Pro's

• Fast turnaround time

• Relatively inexpensive, requiring only a small sample of the customer population

• Do not assume the problem to be discussed is precisely known; conducive to "blue-sky" brainstorming, which may lead to bold and creative solutions

• Can generate a tremendous amount of information

• Can reveal unsuspected problems; generate new ideas; and use the customer's language

• Can generate explanations or solutions even when you yourself are not sure of the real problem

• Explore customer choice and priorities

• Show the way your product/service fits in the customers' environment and lifestyle

The Con's

•Do not produce numerical values to describe the customers' attitudes and behavior

• Difficult to examine more than one major topic at a time

• Limited by geography, since participants come together in one room at the same time

• Can't predict ultimate success or demand for a program, concept, service or product

• Don't examine variations in opinion among different segments of customers unless you hold a separate focus group for each customer segment

• May yield biased results if they are not executed and interpreted with care

E. Formal Surveys

Surveys are a quantitative information-gathering technique that give numerical expression to attitudes and behaviors. To ensure consistency in surveys, identical questions are asked of all respondents. A properly done survey can be **generalizable**; that is, it can produce results that provide reliable information not only about the particular customers surveyed, but about all of your customers in general.

Quantitative research methods usually draw upon a **sample** of a larger population to adequately represent this population. Often dozens or hundreds of customers can be interviewed and their responses projected to a total population of thousands or millions. With adequate sample sizes, subgroups of the population can be analyzed separately and compared to other subgroups of interest.

Caution: Poor definition of the problem being investigated is a common failing in conducting quantitative research. You can't find out what you don't ask. Since the survey or interview is highly structured, there can be no deviation from the questions, however mistaken they might be. This may invalidate the research, resulting in wasted money, or worse, in recommendations that are off the mark. Accuracy of the chosen sample, both in size and "representativeness," is also a major concern in this type of research.

1. When Customer Surveys Are Appropriate

You can use surveys to measure:

• Customers' satisfaction with your program or agencies.

• Satisfaction with specific services. By asking, *How helpful was your counselor? How useful was your GED workshop?* you can compare satisfaction among services, staff members, programs and vendors. If your customers' opinions about a particular service correlate strongly with their opinion of your entire program, you might infer that improving satisfaction with this particular service will increase satisfaction with your program as a whole. This information is valuable to use in the developing correction action plans.

• Satisfaction with your service delivery. By asking, *How were you treated? Was the receptionist polite?* you learn why customers are satisfied or dissatisfied. You can correlate these responses to satisfaction with your entire program and point you toward areas where small changes may bring large improvements in satisfaction.

• The importance that customers ascribe to specific services.

2. What to Ask

Ask about the customers' views, not facts you already know. Since surveys can provide erroneous information (people forget, make mistakes, fabricate answers), you should use them only to get information you cannot get in any other way. For example: If you want to know how long people wait in line, the best way is to use a stopwatch. But if you want to know how they *feel* about standing in line, use a survey.

3. When to Deliver Surveys

Deliver the right survey at the right time. Ask about customers' expectations before they begin program services. Ask about satisfaction with specific services immediately after customers experience them. Ask about overall satisfaction after customers have had time to form a considered opinion, possibly three months later.

4. Whom to Survey

Obviously, not all your customers are the same. If you survey them as though they were, you will get misleading results. Prior to designing your survey, consider how you want to segment your customers.

Segmentation is a technique that separates survey respondents into groups that interest you. An analysis of the overall satisfaction of, say, welfare mothers, Latinos or older workers may be more meaningful to you than looking only at the satisfaction level of all your respondents. It is important for long-term program improvement strategies to be able to uncover situations in which the dissatisfaction of some segments is hidden by the high satisfaction of others in an overall satisfaction score.

For example, suppose you survey all terminated JTPA participants and ask about their satisfaction with your services, as follows:

Overall, how satisfied were you with this program?

[] Very Satisfied
[] Somewhat Satisfied
[] Somewhat Dissatisfied
[] Very Dissatisfied

Assume that on a four-point scale, ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 4 (very satisfied), the respondents' average score is 3.6. You might be pleased with this result — unless you learn that the average score of welfare mothers is only 1.3, or that the average response of Latinos is 1.8.

If you want to know about sub-groups within your customer population, you must plan your survey to obtain this information. One way is to include questions that ask the respondent directly what subgroup s/he is in, such as *What is your sex?* or *Which of the following racial/ethnic groups do you consider yourself a member of?*

If your survey is anonymous, you must use this approach, because the anonymity prevents you from linking the survey to other information you may have about the individual respondents. However, if respondents are willing to give their names, you can use information you have on file. The U.S. Department of Labor requires that many employment and training programs collect data on the sex, race, age, education level and other classifications of participants. If you know who each survey respondent is, then you can make use of these data to segment the respondents.

You might first examine the population segments used in computing the JTPA performance standards, since these data have been researched extensively for their effect on program outcomes.

If you segment your population into too many sub-groups, though, you may have difficulty in getting a sample of each group that is large enough to be representative, and the data you collect might not be meaningful.

Another kind of sub-group in your customer population are the groups of customers who have used different services, such as auto-repair training or word-processing training. The considerations discussed above for sub-groups of customers based on demographic characteristics also apply to sub-groups of customers based on the services they used.

Customer input generated by program area will provide the data needed to analyze the relative strengths and weaknesses of your program areas. This analysis will help managers prioritize areas needing attention and focus resources on those areas indicated by your customers.

5. How to Study Both Satisfaction and Importance

When you segment your service components in order to ask customers their satisfaction with each one, you should realize that your customers probably don't consider all of your services equally important. Try to obtain their feelings of satisfaction as well as the importance they attach to each service area that they rate. This way you have a means to distinguish serious problems from more trivial concerns.

In order to learn about importance, you need to survey your customers twice: once to ask which features or attributes of your services they consider most important, and again to ask whether they are satisfied with your performance on these features or attributes.

It is a good idea to let time pass between these surveys, lest one response unduly influence the other. Survey experts have legitimate differences of opinion in this area. Some believe it to be acceptable to include importance and satisfaction questions in the same survey if the questions are separated as much as possible in the survey. The following example uses time separation, but it could be shown as one survey with two sets of questions.

Assume you want to find out your customers' opinions of the ABC Classroom Training Course. During the intake and assessment process, as clients are considering whether to enroll in the ABC course, you might have them fill out the following form.

Please tell us which of these features of the ABC training course are important to you:

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Somewhat Unimportant	Very Unimportant
Class hours	1	2	3	4
Class location	1	2	3	4
Length of training	1	2	3	4
Facilities	1	2	3	4
Availability of tutoring	1	2	3	4
On-site day-care	1	2	3	4
Instructor's teaching skills	1	2	3	4

Once clients complete the ABC course, you might ask about their level of satisfaction with these same features.

When you were attending the ABC course, how satisfied were you with each of the following features:

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Class hours	1	2	3	4
Class location	1	2	3	4
Length of training	1	2	3	4
Facilities	1	2	3	4
Availability of tutoring	1	2	3	4
On-site day-care	1	2	3	4
Instructor's teaching skills	1	2	3	4

After you gather this data from many customers, you can see how your customers think your agency is performing in the areas that matter most to them.

Tabulating the above two surveys gives you two numbers for each attribute of the ABC course that you are measuring: one number represents the average importance that customers assign to that attribute, and the other represents the average satisfaction that customers feel about that attribute. Your analysis might look like this.

Attribute	**Importance**	**Satisfaction**
A. Class hours	3.8	3.3
B. Class location	2.9	3.1
C. Length of training	1.6	3.0
D. Facilities	2.5	2.8
E. Availability of tutoring	3.0	1.8
F. On-site day care	1.5	3.5
G. Instructor's teaching skills	3.2	1.0

You can then plot each attribute on a two-axis grid, with the vertical axis representing importance and the horizontal axis representing satisfaction. An example of such a grid, often called the Customer Window™, is shown below.

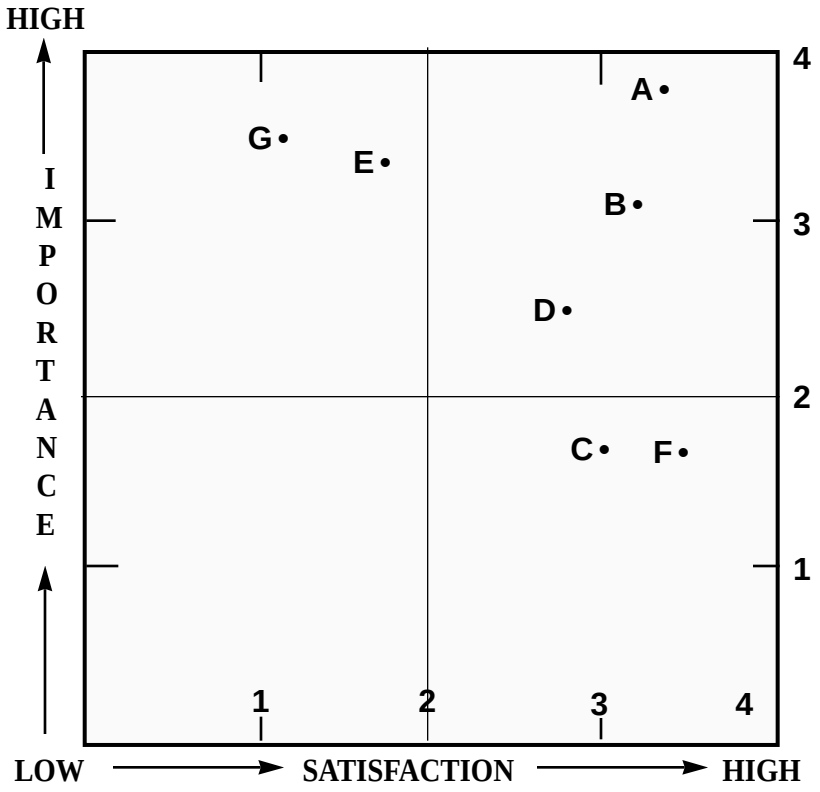
Attributes and features clustered in the *upper-right quadrant* of the grid are important to your customers and about which they are satisfied. These are the things you are doing well.

Attributes and features clustered in the *upper-left quadrant* are considered important to your customers, but they are dissatisfied with your performance. These may be serious problems and should be priorities for corrective action.

Attributes and features in the *lower half* of the grid are considered unimportant by your customers, who may not care whether you have satisfied them. You might consider shifting resources away from those areas. (If no one thinks ABC's on-site day care center is an important service, perhaps its budget and staffing could be cut back.) If a feature not thought to be important is in fact truly essential, you may need to educate your customers about its value or necessity.

The results of this survey were plotted on the following grid, measuring both customer satisfaction and perceived importance.

The Two-Dimension Grid for Plotting Survey Results



The picture that emerges helps you understand your participants' view of your services in a way that helps you translate these attitudes into a potential action plan. An analysis of this grid might result in the following observations:

Upper-right quadrant. ABC enrollees think the course's convenient hours and location are important, and they are satisfied that ABC accommodates them.

Upper-left quadrant. They are satisfied with the on-site day-care program, but customers who do not need child care may not think it's important (an example of the importance of customer segmentation). They would like more tutoring, possibly to make up for what they see as deficient teaching skills. They are dissatisfied that ABC does not provide adequate tutoring and or teaching skills.

Lower half. Since it is possible that improving the teaching skills of instructors will reduce the importance of tutoring, ABC needs to determine if there is a relationship between tutoring and teaching skills. If there is no relationship, both areas need improvement. This information is useful information to ABC's managers as they plan for ongoing improvements in their course offerings.

6. Survey Methods

Interviews in person. Using a live interviewer to ask questions and record the answers helps encourage the respondent to answer all the questions. People generally are reluctant to refuse to answer a polite question directly from another person. To avoid bias, the interviewer should not be someone from whom the respondent has received services or someone whose performance respondents are being asked to rate.

Respondents often ask the interviewer to help them interpret the questions, a situation that interviewers must be trained to handle. Usually the best course is for the interviewer to politely refuse to provide any interpretation, in order to avoid influencing any responses. A skilled interviewer can ask open-ended questions and probe for more informative responses.

In live interviews, the interviewer can ask different follow-up questions based on a respondent's answers to previous questions. For example, if a respondent answers that s/he is not employed, an interviewer can skip questions related to current job status. Written questionnaires can also instruct respondents to skip certain questions, but these instructions can be confusing and are not as flexible as a live interviewer.

Interviews in person can be cheaper and can produce a higher response rate than telephone interviews if the respondents are already at your location for another reason. You can call participants out of training or other services to be interviewed. Customer-satisfaction questions can be added to an interview you already conduct, such as an intake interview. In-person interviews also allow you to show respondents information that is hard to describe over the telephone; for example, *Do you remember filling out this form?*

Interviews by telephone present a challenge: reaching the respondents. Not all people have telephones, and you need to know the correct numbers for those who do. Many people are not reachable by phone during business hours, so you must be willing to call evenings and on weekends. To obtain interviews, you must be prepared to leave messages on answering machines, talk to family members, leave a number where the respondent can reach you and call repeatedly.

Written questionnaires generally are more convenient to administer than live interviews. Respondents may be more honest (especially about embarrassing questions) responding to written questionnaires, especially anonymous ones. Written questionnaires are better if respondents need to refer to records or ask other people before answering some questions. For example, when asking firms about their satisfaction with people they hired in various departments or locations, written questionnaires make more sense.

The major challenge with written questionnaires is getting respondents to complete them. Respondents must be literate. Questions should be few and clear. Instructions should be short and clear.

On-site questionnaires, such as course-evaluation forms, are commonly distributed at the end of training sessions. Response rates are often low, and the data are relatively useless. You can take steps to remedy this response by explaining the importance of the survey when it is distributed. Make it clear where the respondent is to return the completed form and make it easy to do so. Provide pencils and a place to write. Distribute the surveys at a time when the respondents are not running to leave.

Questionnaires in the mail are useful when the survey is long or when large numbers of people are to be contacted (the longer the survey, the less likely it will be returned). They are usually better suited to personal questions, since they are the least intrusive type of interview.

Make it easy to get the responses back to you. Enclosing a stamped, self-addressed return envelope makes it clear that *you* think this survey is important. Write a personally addressed cover letter signed by the agency director and send it with first class postage.

If survey responses are not confidential, you can do telephone follow-up.

7. Designing Survey Instruments

The most important work of surveying is done up front. Good survey design, where good clear questions produce good data, is far more important than sophisticated analysis at the end. If you have to choose, put your resources into design, not analysis.

Before you design a survey, determine how you will use the information Don't collect information just to have it. For each question, try to guess what the answers might look like, what you will do with the answers and, most important, what you will do *about* the answers. If you can't answer these pre-questions rationally and concretely, don't ask the survey question in that way (or at all).

Imagine what the answers to each question might be and try to link the responses to program improvements. Do not ask the question if the link cannot be made.

Avoid biasing the responses by the way you phrase the questions or deliver the survey. You can get more reliable data from **anonymous** responses, but then you may have to ask respondents for demographic data that is on file. Third-party interviewers are useful when objectivity is critical.

Word questions in a neutral way to avoid discomforting respondents who don't want to be thought of as negative for complaining. Avoid loaded words and phrases that customers might misconstrue. While you might use the term caseworker, most people don't like to think of themselves as cases.

Adjust the strength of the questions to spread the responses across the whole response scale. If you word questions so that everybody agrees enthusiastically, you learn nothing. You want a range of opinions. Devising a response scale with more choices allows for finer analysis; but it is harder to fill out, implies an impractical level of precision and is harder to quickly rate the responses. We recommend a five-point scale, but use a ten-point scale to obtain finer gradations. Open-ended questions are time-consuming to read and evaluate but are flexible and can uncover things that you didn't think to ask about in the formal survey.

Pretest the questionnaire with potential respondents to ensure that the instructions and questions are understood as intended.

Tips for Designing A Questionnaire

• Make the questionnaire look attractive.

• Include brief, clear instructions printed in bold type.

• Organize and design the questionnaire so it is easy to complete.

• Make the questions clear. Do not assume respondents know your jargon. Use simple sentences without qualifiers that hedge the meaning. When you can choose complex or simple wording, select simplicity.

• Use as few kinds of questions and instructions as possible. If you use a point-scale to measure feelings, draft the scale from best to worst. Word *agree/disagree* questions so that *agree* is always the positive choice. Avoid mixing positive and negative statements.

• Avoid ambiguity. Word questions so that, if only one answer is assumed, categories of answers are mutually exclusive.

• Avoid "double-barreled" questions. Ask questions that address a single issue. For example, the following question asks about two separate issues, the answers for which might be different. *Would you rate the instructor and the course work as excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor?*

• Avoid leading questions that steer respondents to a particular answer. Avoid, for example, a question like, *Do you think that, with the high cost of training, you should be doing more to help employees?*

• Open the questionnaire with a few interesting and non-threatening items.

• Do not put important items at the end of a long questionnaire.

• Use examples with any questions that might be confusing or difficult to understand.

• When moving to a new topic, use transitional sentences.

• Keep the questionnaire as short as possible.

• Avoid biasing the responses by the way you phrase the questions. Word questions in a neutral way. Avoid loaded words and phrases that customers might misconstrue.

• Do not use more than a five-point scale. Larger scales force respondents to make unrealistically fine judgments and unnecessarily complicate data collection and analysis.

• Include the name and telephone number of a person to contact with questions.

8. Sampling and Responsiveness

For small groups (fewer than 150 people), survey everyone.

For larger groups, surveying a *sample* of your entire population is more cost- effective. If the population is very large (all eligible participants, for example) sampling may be the only practical way to do a survey. *Take care that the sample be representative of your entire population. An invalid sample will prevent you from making correct inferences about your entire population. The critical concerns for choosing a sample that is representative are (1) randomness and (2) size.* If you survey a large group, you need to choose a sample that is random and that is large enough for you to make correct inferences about the entire population.

Randomness means that each person in the population you want to sample has an equal chance of being chosen; it should involve program dropouts, people who have moved away and other hard-to-contact folks.

Selecting a survey sample is ticklish. Suppose you choose every third (fourth, fifth, etc.) name on the list of your group, or population. Is this a random list? Only if your original list is random. If your list is organized by date of enrollment or termination, it may exclude people with earlier or later dates. If your list is alphabetical, it may be biased because some ethnic groups have names that cluster in certain parts of the list.

Figuratively drawing names out of a hat is the best solution. Use a table of random numbers, contained in most statistics books and many computer programs. Assign each name a number and choose numbers from your table of random numbers. (See box on page II-20.)

The second key issue in choosing a representative sample is **size**. The larger the size of the sample, the better it approximates the entire population. Experts call this the "level of confidence" that the survey responses can be used to predict the opinions of the entire population. Typically you choose the desired level of confidence (90 percent, 95 percent or 99 percent) that your sample describes the population from which it is drawn, then use a statistics book to determine the size of the sample you need. If you are unable to survey the recommended number of respondents, you may have to accept a lower level of confidence.

As a general rule, sample sizes of less than 30 are not considered reliable for inferences about a larger population. This means that you need at least 30 responses (filled-out surveys) to correctly estimate one characteristic of one group. Example: If you're sorting by white/non-white and male/female, you need responses from at least 30 non-white males, 30 non-white females, 30 white males, and 30 white females to provide separate estimates for each sub-group.

Thirty responses are a bare minimum for any population that is much bigger than 30. The reliability of your estimates improves if you can obtain more completed responses. Thirty responses may give a reliability rate of only plus-or- minus 18 percent. One hundred and twenty responses gives a better reliability of plus-or-minus 9 percent, and 240 responses gives a reliability of plus-or-minus-6 percent.

Response-rate is an important factor in surveys. If you get less than a 50- percent response-rate from your surveys, you should hesitate to generalize from the data. Surveying is based on the presumption that the respondents are typical of a larger group. If the response-rate is low, then the typical group member may not have responded.

Increasing the rate of response to mailed questionnaires is the most important thing that you can do to improve the usefulness of the results. To increase responses, you might try these:

Basic response-boosters

- Provide return postage.
- Verify the correct names and addresses.
- Prepare your target customers with advance notice about the survey.
- Encourage active customers to respond.

Advanced response-boosters

(each of which may increase the response-rate by as much as 15 percent)

• A week after the initial mailing, send a postcard as a reminder to everyone who received the questionnaire. On the postcard, which need not be personalized, write that this person's input is very important and that you hope they will respond.

• Resend the survey to non-respondents. This technique requires tracking responses carefully so as not to bother those who have already responded.

• Place a phone number on the original survey and on the reminder postcard, suggesting that respondents call if they need help or another copy of the survey.

• Keep the survey brief and easy to complete. There is a correlation between response-rates and the length and complexity of the questionnaire.

• Enclose an incentive, such as a crisp dollar bill or a pack of gum, as a gesture of appreciation. More effective is adding each respondent's name to a drawing for a prize such as a TV. You can maintain anonymity by enclosing a separate postcard for the drawing.

Creating A Sample

- Create a list of individuals who make up the entire population to be studied, if possible.
- Assign a random number to each individual using a random-numbers table or computer algorithm.
- Select the individuals with the lowest values of the random numbers, up to the sample size you want.

Example: To choose 300 out of 900 participants, select all individuals whose random number is 300 or below. Here you see that all individuals assigned a random number of 300 or below were selected.

Individual	Random Number	Status
A	024	Selected
B	119	Selected
C	482	
D	272	Selected
E	325	
F	667	
G	112	Selected
H	625	
I	178	Selected
J	627	

And so on.

9. Advantages and Disadvantages of Research Methods

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Since you already have the data, it typically doesn't examine variations in opinion among different segments of customers. Can yield biased results if not executed and interpreted with great care.cheaper than collecting new data.	No direct customer input.
Requires no additional information from your customers.	Errors in the database can lead to false conclusions.
Exposes data that you wish you had collected but didn't foresee the need to collect.	The data in a database may be difficult to organize in useful ways.

FOCUS GROUPS

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Provides a holistic view of the area being studied: A combination of the respondents' thoughts and their visceral reactions.	Presents a logistical challenge in coordinating participants' schedules and selecting a site that is both accessible and conducive to open discussion.
Allows flexibility at exploratory stages and can branch into additional areas of interest based on respondents' comments.	Can't delve into too many issues at one time. You have less control over data collection because participants shape the discussion.
Explores customers' choice processes and priorities.	Requires a skilled moderator able to encourage expression of views while keeping the discussion on track.
Reveals insights and nuances that other research methods, such as surveys, usually cannot obtain.	Examines only a small number of people. Is not statistically generalizable to the overall customer base. Is a qualitative, not a quantitative, approach. Results cannot be presented in numerical ways.
Identifies areas for further quantitative research.	Typically doesn't examine variations in opinion among different segments of customers. Can yield biased results if not executed and interpreted with great care.

INFORMAL INTERVIEWS

ADVANTAGES

Requires minimal resources and can be done by the smallest organization.

High completion-rates are likely and provide timely feedback.

Yields in-depth responses. Interviewer can probe further based upon responses given to a particular question.

Interviewer can observe respondents and record observations as data. Begins to track patterns, thereby identifying areas for further research.

DISADVANTAGES

Presence of interviewer may cause respondents to answer questions the way they think the interviewer wants.

Data can be biased if interviewer asks leading questions.

Can't generalize information to the whole customer base. Respondents may or may not be representative of many others.

Sharing data while maintaining confidentiality may be difficult.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

ADVANTAGES

Can be completed quickly.

Interviewer's bias is less likely than with personal interviews, since the interviewer isn't face-to-face with the respondent.

Relatively inexpensive method. If done well and not too long, produces a good response-rate.

DISADVANTAGES

Can reach only customers with telephones.

Respondents may feel less committed to take the time to think about responses or complete the interview.

Interviewer can influence responses based on intonation and types of follow-up questions.

MAIL SURVEYS

ADVANTAGES

Respondents can work at their own speed.

Interviewer bias is eliminated.

By providing adequate instruction, solid data can be gathered.

Can be tabulated by computer.

Can easily be mass-produced.

DISADVANTAGES

A greater number of partially completed surveys occurs without an interviewer.

Respondent doesn't have a person to interpret instructions or clarify questions. (Possible confusion and/or frustration).

Typically have a low response-rate.

Response-rates tend to drop as surveys get longer.

Usefulness depends on how well the survey is prepared.

SECTION III

INTERPRETING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMER

INTERPRETING THE VOICE OF YOUR CUSTOMER

This section explains the rationale and some of the methods used to analyze the data collected from mail or phone or through personal interviews. It also discusses how to use those data to plan and implement corrective actions that will improve the satisfaction of your customers.

A. Analyzing Data

The information gained from surveys is only as good as the forethought put into the design of the study and data collection. Data for data's sake are not useful. Collected data must be organized and analyzed with the goal of providing information to answer the research objectives.

1. Editing Survey Questionnaires

Once questionnaires are returned, you must review and edit them to be sure that all relevant questions have been answered and/or recorded. This not only provides a quality check for the data received but, like any other production-line process, it prepares the data for data-entry. In some cases you can re-contact the respondents concerning missing or unclear answers.

2. Coding Data

Before you can analyze the data you collect, you must code it. Simply put, coding means assigning a number to categorize or classify the answers.

Of course, some items are self-explanatory (e.g., number of people in the household, frequency of specific behavior, etc.). Except for the handling of missing information, this information is already coded.

However, there are many answers for which numbers are not relevant until the data are analyzed (i.e., yes/no, rating scales, demographic classifications, verbatim responses, etc.). These answers need to be categorized, and it is usually a good idea to build in precodes to questionnaires *before* they are administered. This is extremely helpful when the coded data are entered in a database full of data.

To precode responses, write numbers next to the answer categories on the questionnaire. Whenever possible, use a numbering system that lends itself to more meaningful data analysis. For example, rating scales are usually set up so that the lowest

rating gets the lowest number (usually a 1) and each higher-level answer has a higher number, so that a scale from 1 to 5 means that a 1 is lowest and a 5 is highest. This is especially helpful when you want a meaningful average rating across respondents.

In addition to the collected information, the questionnaires in a survey are often coded to identify specific questionnaires, should the need arise. For example, incomplete and completed surveys might be coded to enable a comparative analysis.

An important issue in coding responses is to distinguish between answers and blanks. For example, an answer of *zero*, *none*, or *no opinion* is a valid answer. All of these are different from a blank, mis-coded or unreadable non-answer. You will need to know the difference when it is time to analyze the data.

When it is either too late or inappropriate to re-contact respondents to fill in the missing information, you still must code the missing information. As a rule, when coding missing information, use a value, such as *99* or *00*, that is outside the range of anticipated answers, and try to use a standard set of codes for all missing information.

3. Data Entry

Unless you plan on hand-tallying questionnaires, data entry follows the editing and coding of collected survey questionnaires. In this step, the coded data is entered into a computer file that comprises the database for subsequent data analysis. In general, data are entered in a fixed-format procedure, aligning the questionnaire answers (also referred to as data fields) in a standard format for each respondent. A familiar, commonly used fixed-format database can be found in standard spreadsheets, where the data for each subject is set up in rows, and each column represents a specific answer.

Following data entry, which is sometimes repeated to check for accuracy, the data are cleaned. This step ensures that the entered data are within acceptable, established values, and allows for consistency checks to be sure that data fields that should have been skipped or answered have in fact been skipped or answered (based on earlier questions). If any discrepancies have occurred, the problem questionnaires can be identified for cross-checking against the database, and any corrections can be made at this time.

4. Tabulating and Summarizing Data

Survey data need to be summarized in a way that can be easily interpreted but is still relevant to the research objectives of the study. There are several basic techniques to analyze data.

A tally, also called an addition, or simple frequency, is the most basic technique for looking at data across respondents. A tally counts answers, and most people have little or no difficulty understanding frequencies. However, unless you are dealing with a sample size of 100 or more, tallies can be misleading.

For example, suppose two groups of respondents are being compared. Group A has 100 respondents, and Group B has 75 respondents. Suppose that 50 respondents in each group report participating in training programs in the past month. If we say that an equal number (50) of each group had participated, could you conclude that Groups A and B had equal participation levels? You could not. Group B had a higher participation level, based on having a higher percentage of participants in training. (50/75 = 67 percent for Group B. 50/100 = 50 percent for Group A.) By themselves, tallies have only a narrow, limited use, and it is difficult to interpret them across groups of respondents with varying sample sizes. In the end, you will need more sophisticated statistics to compare across different groups.

Percentages allow more meaningful comparisons across groups of respondents, regardless of their respective sample sizes, as the previous example shows. Percentages are especially useful when the results desired can be summed up in terms of acceptance/rejection or yes/no-type answers.

How would you rate your instructor?

35 percent	Excellent
25 percent	Very Good
20 percent	Good
15 percent	Fair
5 percent	Poor

Do you like your teacher?

75 percent	Yes
25 percent	No.

In the first example, you might decide that a rating of *Excellent* or *Very Good* is acceptable; and that 35 percent + 25 percent= 60 percent is an acceptable outcome.

Averages, or Measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode): Another basic tool is the average, of which there are three types—the mean, the median and the mode.

The **mean**, usually referred to as the average, is a useful statistic to summarize data when the numbers used to represent the data have fixed intervals between them, such as counts of things. For example, the mean is often used to summarize demographic data such as the number of people in a household; behavior, such as the number of times clients visit a particular training center; or allocation type questions, such as *How often does this bus arrive on schedule?*

The **median**, although not used as often as the mean, is also a useful, and sometimes more accurate measure of central tendency for certain data. The median is the midpoint of the data. Half of the collected data falls below the median, and half above. Medians are especially useful for summarizing data when the range of values is large or heavily skewed by a few extremely low or high values that pull the mean (average) away from the center.

For example, if nine families have annual incomes of $20,000 and one family has an income of $100,000, the mean (arithmetic average) would suggest that the average family income is about $28,000, while the median — $20,000 — is more representative of the entire sample.

The mean and median have their place in data analysis. However, they both depend on data for which the numbers are themselves meaningful. Neither the median nor the mean is very useful for data gathered from yes/no type questions, nor for measuring classifications. (How many of the sample are white females?)

The third measure of central tendency, the **mode**, is probably more related to frequencies and percentages than either the mean or median. The mode represents the value or values which occur with the greatest frequency in the data. Unlike the mean or median, the mode can be used for both real numbers, such as actual age, height, sex as well as with numbers that only serve as codes to classify answers such as race, occupation, or preferences. In the example above, the mode is the same as the median, i.e., $20,000.

5. Measures of Variation

If all people gave the same uniform answers to questions all of the time, we would not need to consider variations in the data. Of course, this rarely happens. **Variance**, much as central tendencies, is an attempt to summarize data. However it measures variances in the data instead of averages. How spread out is the data? How loose or tight is the range of answers? Its most familiar use is to test the statistically significant differences between groups.

6. Statistical Reliability

Unless you collect data for the entire population of interest, the respondents in your survey are only a sample of that population. Whether for issues such as cost, time constraints, logistical impossibilities, or sensitivities, most surveys rely on samples to make inferences about the population as a whole. Therefore, the results must rely on the use of statistical significance techniques to ensure that differences between groups studied are not simply due to random sampling error.

For example, the true mean for annual income within a studied group might be $29,000, but our survey sample has given us a mean of $25,000. How do we know how close the sample's mean is to the entire population's mean? The answer depends on a few fundamental questions:

- How large was the sample?
- What was the variance in the data?
- What is the mean (median, percent) of the data?

In general, the precision with which the sample mean approaches the true population mean increases as the sample size increases, and the variation in the data declines. Unless you have data from all of the population, you can never be totally sure that the sample mean equals the population mean. Some level of compromise is inevitable. Statisticians speak of a level of confidence that the sample mean is within a range that also includes the true mean for the entire population.

As sample size, therefore, is a very important factor to consider in data analysis. The larger the sample, the better it is as an estimator of the entire population. As previously noted, samples of less than 30 individuals are not considered reliable for generalizing survey results to a larger population. In fact, samples of less than 30 are not usually analyzed using statistics, unless they constitute the entire population being studied. Reliability increases as sample sizes increase and sample sizes above 120 are considered generally reliable for many analyses.

A final consideration is the degree to which the sample is **representative** of the entire population. Take care with this! Samples which not based on random sampling techniques are not dependable for inferences to the general population and can easily be heavily biased. The goal here is a valid methodology to select a miniature replica of the entire population being sampled.

B. Using Data Analysis to Improve Your Program Operations

After you gather and analyze information about customer-satisfaction and values, use these data to draft a list of potential improvement areas. If you do not do this, you have wasted your customers' time. These potential improvement areas need to be transformed from global problems to specific issues that can be used to change your agency's operations in ways that remedy identified deficiencies and promote improvement.

For example, assume that your survey of employers hints that one classroom training program (the NW Cooking School) needs improvement. In order to corroborate this judgment, you should analyze data from more than one source of customer information. You know that employers are dissatisfied with NW's graduates. Do surveys of participants reveal that they also are dissatisfied with the training they get? What do the data on placement and retention on-the-job show? Are they below average?

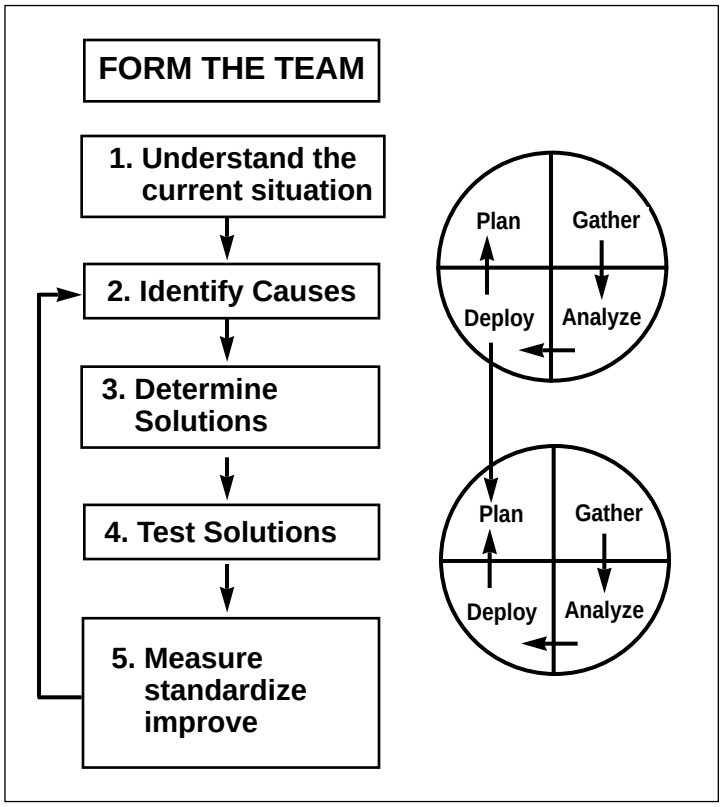
If all three sources of information corroborate each other, then you can be fairly confident that NW needs some sort of corrective action. Of course, your surveys may point out that other programs are worse. You will have to consider many factors, e.g., number of participants or employers involved, cost, time and effort involved, public relations and staff capabilities as you prioritize from among possible improvement projects.

C. Conducting an Improvement Project

The following five-step model is easily adaptable to most employment and training agencies. Begin the process by forming an **improvement team** and giving that team a charter, an empowerment, to study and recommend action. In this case you might ask the manager of the NW School to form such a team and include a member of your staff and an employer. The team should go through the following five steps in sequence:

1. Study and understand the current situation.

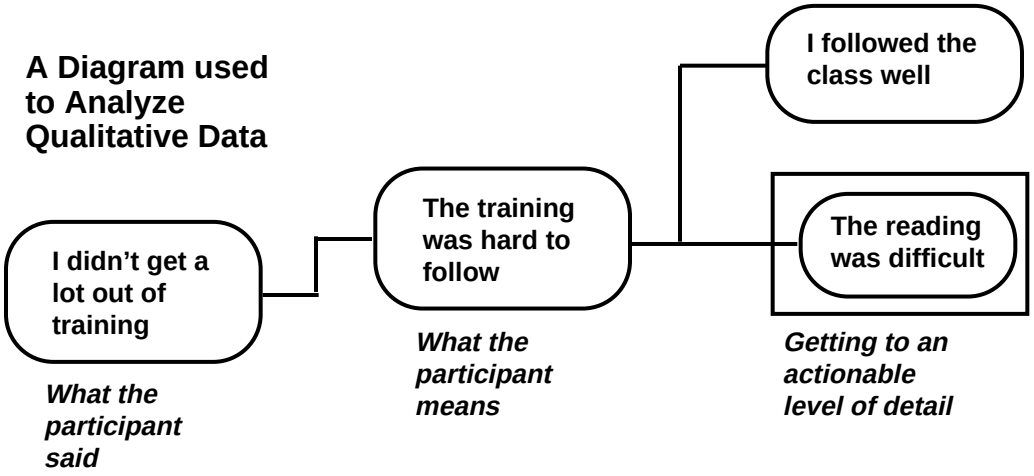
Study and understand the current situation. The team begins by examining the analysis of the customer-satisfaction data, outcome data and other performance information. They learn that a) employers scored the school low, b) participants scored it low, and c) its placement data is below average. There is a definite problem here. But knowing this isn't enough. The team must look behind the numbers and examine the actual responses that those who were surveyed made to the various questions asked. This quantitative data is often the key to understanding the root of the problem. It may be necessary to go back to



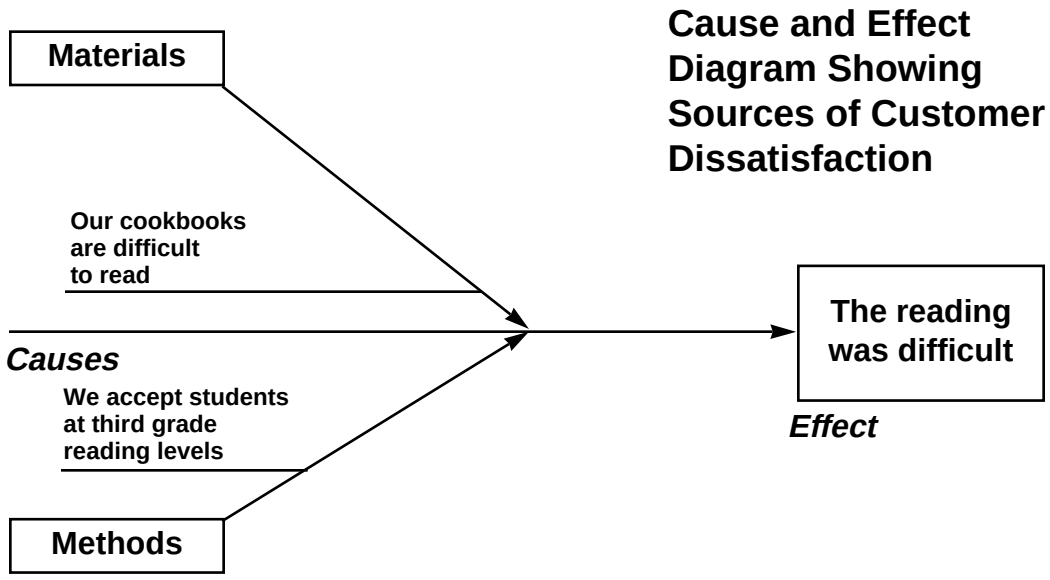
the respondents for clarification, or even to do a focus group session to zero in on an actionable level of detail.

2. Identify causes of the problem.

Identify causes of the problem. The quantitative data might show that participants, when surveyed by telephone, said *I didn't get a lot out of that training.* Further probing might reveal that *The training was hard to follow* and that the cause of this problem was that *The reading level of the course materials was difficult.*



The improvement team might query the staff of the NW school to learn why participants think the reading material was difficult. This might reveal two facts: 1) the cookbooks the school uses are difficult to read, and 2) the school accepts students who read at a third-grade level.



3. Determine solutions.

Determine solutions. Your working hypothesis is that the problem has to do with a mismatch of reading levels of the participants and the training materials. You must test this hypothesis.

The improvement team could measure the reading levels required of the cookbooks and the reading ability of the current participants. Or they could include questions about the readability of the cookbooks on the next customer-satisfaction survey. They may determine that a sixth-grade reading level is needed to fully understand the materials.

There are at least two solutions: 1) raise the entrance requirements for this course to include a sixth-grade reading level (measured at assessment), or 2) add a basic reading component to the cooking course curriculum. Both solutions have undesirable aspects. The first may deny this training to clients who are among the hardest to serve, possibly a special target group of the agency. The second increases costs and decreases the total number of people who can be served. But either is better than closing the training program because of poor performance or customer dissatisfaction.

4. Test recommended solutions.

Test recommended solutions. Over the next training cycle, monitor reading levels

of new enrollees. Better reading skills should produce more satisfied participants, better and more lasting job placements and happier employers.

5. Measure, standardize, improve.

Measure, standardize, improve. After implementing the corrective actions, the team should expect to see improvements in the overall satisfaction of both participants and employers. It is important to measure and track outcomes over time to enable a proper evaluation of any particular outcome. Such data-tracking makes it possible to tell the difference between normal variations from the standard and extraordinary variations that may indicate the need for further examination.

Sometimes the problems are hidden. In one actual case, the problem was in the testing of potential participants. The reading test was timed to take one hour, but assessment staff did not know that. They let participants finish at their leisure. Many scored higher than warranted by their actual abilities and were admitted to training classes that they could not handle. The ultimate solution was to standardize testing procedures and conduct staff training.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT STEPS

Step 1
PLAN

Identify Customers

1) Employers
2) Job seekers
3) Potential applicants, etc.

Three steps of Segmentation

1) Identify segments for your business
2) Prioritize your segments
3) Identify key customers in each segment

Prioritize (select primary problems to focus customer satisfaction measurements). Select research method most appropriate for customer target group.

1) What is the situation
2) How can you gather data
3) Who is available?
4) What are the resources available
5) What is your timeline?
6) Determine how you will analyze data
7) Think about how you will use information

Examine methods (review summary of different research methods)

1) Surveys - telephone or - mail
2) Focus groups
3) Interviews
4) In-house data
5) Mystery shopper

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT STEPS

Step II
GATHER

Develop method	Focus Group	Mail Interview	Telephone Surveys
	1) Refer to *Customer in Focus* companion publication 2) Develop moderator's discussion guide. 3 Determine how to identify participants. 4) Train staff. 5) Run focus groups.	1) Determine what you want to know. 2) Determine format for questions (be concise and consistent). 3) Try to estimate how long it should take to complete survey. 4) Update your mailing list. 5) Refer to tips for survey questions. 6) Develop sample questions. 7) Pre-test questions. 8) Re-write any questions that are confusing, biased, misleading. 9) Mail out surveys (provide return envelopes).	1) Determine what you want to know. 2) Structure a series of questions that will provide short answers and a few open-ended questions which allow respondent to express views in their own terms. 3) Estimate length of time to complete survey. 4) Pre-test your questions and length of time to complete survey. 5) Develop an introduction script to train staff. 6) Train staff. 7) Conduct surveys.

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT STEPS

Step III
ANALYZE

1) Review response rates, if very low response, evaluate how you can boost response rate.
2) Review data for completeness/accuracy
3) Evaluate/categorize responses
4) Tabulate information
5) Arrange in meaningful way

Step IV
DEPLOY

1) Utilize the 5 step model to conduct an improvement project.
2) Examine the current situation (using data collected).
3) Try to identify causes of problem/s.
4) Determine solutions.
5) Test recommended solutions.
6) Measure, standardize, improve.

WE NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Based on feedback we receive, we will be developing training sessions on The Voice of the Customer (V.O.C.). Please let us know your needs.

Please rank the following V.O.C. areas that are most important for you or your staff to receive training (rate from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most important to your organization).

Mail Surveys _____
Telephone Surveys _____
Focus Groups _____
Developing Survey Questions _____
Analyzing and Using Data Collected _____
Other_____ _____

Please indicate your preference for length of training sessions

1 day_____ 1½ days_____ 3 days_____

Please indicate your preferred learning style

Mostly lecture _____
Mostly large group activities _____
Mostly small group activities _____
Other _____

Name _____

Title_____

Organization _____

Address _____

_____

Phone #: _____

Fax #: _____

Please fax or mail this form back as soon as possible to:

Simply Better!
c/o U.S. D.O.L.
Employment and Training Administration
Room N 4469
200 Constitution Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

FAX (202) 219-7190

THE SIMPLY BETTER! Team:

There are six **Simply Better!** Product Development Teams from organizations around the country working with over 50 front-line agencies to guarantee the quality and ease-of-use of our products. The larger **Simply Better!** movement includes private industry councils, private sector service providers, employment service agencies, state agencies, community colleges, and the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration. The Simply Better! Team members are:

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About SIMPLY BETTER!

Simply Better! is an initiative of employment and training professionals and agencies committed to continuously improving the quality of their services and their performance by uncovering and acting on what satisfies their primary customers – jobseekers and employers. Organizations currently affiliated with **Simply Better!** include Private Industry Councils, employment and training service providers, state and local governments, and the US Department of Labor.

In addition to *The Voice of the Customer,* the **Simply Better!** project has produced and is producing the following publications:

- A *Self-Assessment System* for employment and training program operators. This package of materials incorporates principles from the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award and other such programs tailored to the needs of the employment and training system. The materials lead the user through a self-examination of seven key areas of organizational management including leadership, strategic planning, human resource development, operational analysis and customer satisfaction, and provides agencies with a well defined picture of their strengths and need for improvement.

- *Service by Design* This guide to improving service delivery takes quality improvement processes that have proven effective in the private sector and translates them into an employment and training context. By following a six step process for analyzing program operations, users will be able to improve the quality of front-line transactions – the points of contact between agency staff and the customer.

- *Customers in Focus* This companion to *The Voice of the Customer* examines focus groups in much greater detail. The entire focus group process is covered, including preparing a discussion guide, selecting participants, assessing moderator skills, and analyzing data for quality improvements.

ABOUT SIMPLY BETTER!

- *Case Studies in Quality* This ongoing series will explore real life examples of providers that have improved the quality of their services by adopting principles of continuous improvement and putting the customer first.

- *Measures of Success* Reliable data is critical for continuous improvement. This guide will help organizations decide which tools and measurements will best meet their management and information needs. It will explore outcome measures such as customer satisfaction, return on investment, and labor market outcomes, as well as internal process measures such as cycle time.

To learn more about **Simply Better!** products, services and affiliates, call your Regional Office of the Employment and Training Administration and ask to speak with the **Simply Better!** representative or call:

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The Voice of the Customer

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If you would like additional copies of **The Voice of the Customer** or more information about other **Simply Better!** products, or if you need assistance with your continuous improvement journey, please call or fax the **Simply Better!** representative at the nearest regional office of the Employment and Training Administration:

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